

**Potential Health Impacts of Climate Variability and Change for the United States,  
Executive Summary of the *Report of the Health Sector of the U.S. National Assessment***

I am pleased to announce that on Wednesday, March 15, 2000, the Executive Summary of the *Report of the Health Sector*, conducted as part of the *U.S. National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change*, was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Environmental Health Perspectives*. This journal is published by the NIH-National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

Dr. Michael McGeehin of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and assessment Co-chair notes that "This report is unique because it is the first time a group of leading public health experts has been brought together to begin to assess potential health consequences of global climate change specific to the United States."

The health sector assessment was sponsored by and conducted in partnership with the EPA's Global Change Research Program. The report was produced by a Health Sector Work Group, co-chaired by Dr. Jonathan Patz (Johns Hopkins University) and Dr. Michael McGeehin (CDC). The Lead Authors represent a broad range of scientific opinion on the health effects of climate change, and were drawn from academia (Johns Hopkins University, Harvard Medical School, the University of South Florida), government (EPA/ORD, NOAA, CDC-Division of Vector-borne Diseases, CDC-Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects), and the private sector (Electric Power Research Institute).

The *U.S. National Assessment of the Potential Consequences of Climate Variability and Change* was mandated by the Global Change Research Act of 1990 and is the responsibility of the interagency U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP). The findings of the Health Sector Assessment Report will be consolidated with those from other regional and sectoral assessments into a report to Congress later this year. This report is being prepared by the National Assessment Synthesis Team (NAST). The NAST is a committee chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) with members drawn from government, academia, and the private sector.

Despite the wide range of scientific opinions held by the Lead Authors, they concluded that climate change and climate variability could have measurable effects on human health. If the global climate becomes warmer, some adverse health outcomes might result, but some beneficial effects may also occur. For example, heat-related deaths and illnesses, effects due to extreme weather events, and water- and food-borne disease could increase, but winter deaths due to extreme cold could decrease. Certain geographic and demographic populations (such as the elderly, very young children, and the poor) will be most at risk.

Definitive predictions cannot be made at this time. Yet, the authors conclude that *increased* improvements in public health and increasingly vigilant monitoring both of climate conditions and of the nation's health status are key to protecting the health of Americans against the consequences of climate change. They identified how the nation can adapt to or prevent some of the health effects of climate change, but recognize that the financial costs of adapting are unknown and potentially high. The report makes clear that the nation must continue to make public health a priority to effectively prevent or adapt to some of the health effects of climate change .

The report went through an extensive peer review process that has been fully documented.

The Lead Authors of the *Report of the Health Sector*, as well as the many contributors and reviewers of the assessment (including EPA researchers), are to be congratulated for their efforts and timely completion of this first assessment report. Their work forms a solid foundation for the ongoing health sector assessment activities being conducted as part of the U.S. National Assessment process.

A copy of the paper can be found at the *Environmental Health Perspectives* website:  
<http://ehis.niehs.nih.gov/topic/global/patz-full.html>

Additional information about the Health Sector Assessment can be found at the Johns Hopkins University website for their Program on Health Effects of Global Environmental Change:  
<http://www.jhsph.edu/globalchange/#Anchor-Continued-49575>

Additional information about the overall U.S. National Assessment can be found at:  
<http://www.nacc.usgcrp.gov/>